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ABSTRACT

This report on suspension practices in the Philadelphia Public School system finds that: (1) Since 1977, on the average, 14.9% of the students have been suspended at least once; (2) Of secondary students, 24.9% have been suspended at least once (since 1977); (3) Overall suspension rates have increased for both minority and non-minority students; (4) There is a disproportionate rate of suspension of minority students in some subdistricts; and (5) Socioeconomic class and race differences do not explain high or low suspension rates since some schools with very similar student bodies had very different rates. Site visits to schools offered some possible explanations for different rates of suspension in schools: (1) Low suspension rates correlated with high community-school involvement; (2) Emphasis on instructional development had a beneficial impact on suspension rates; (3) Schools with high suspension rates were characterized by leadership whose interest was in setting standards in order to achieve control, while schools which emphasized instructional development had low suspension rates; (4) Alternative disciplinary programs were viewed by students and staff as meaningless, leaving suspension the only effective mechanism to control behavior. The report concludes with various policy and procedural recommendations for lowering suspension rates. (CG)

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SUSPENDED STUDENTS -
SUSPENDED LEARNING:

A REPORT ON SUSPENSIONS
IN THE
PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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SOURCES

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This report was a collective effort by staff and volunteers in Parents Union over a two year period. The research and writing was done by Researchers Patricia Ripoll and David Webb under the supervision of Happy Fernandez, Executive Coordinator.

Advice and direction for the research and work on discipline issues was provided by the Discipline Working Group especially Co-Chairs Rochelle Solomon, Glenda Poole and Advocate Coordinator Otelia Robinson. Parents Union Board Co-Chairpersons during 1980-82 contributing to the work were Arbutus Sider, Yvonne Hutchins, Barbara Jordon and Kathe Zepernick. Eugene Erickson and Barbara Bishop also provided direction on the research. Helpful suggestions on the final manuscript were provided by Helen Faust, Norman Newberg, David Horowitz, Peggy MacGregor and the Education Law Center. Office staff Linda Neal and Paula Ford did the typing and reproduction. Graphics and layout was done by Christine Davis and Maxine Thompson.

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June 22, 1982

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INTRODUCTION

It is an undisputed fact that students cannot be taught if they are not in school. In the 1980-81 school year, 35,734[1] students in the Philadelphia public schools were excluded from classes through suspensions. This number represents 15.9% of the school population. At the secondary level, 26% of the population, or one in every four students were suspended at least once[2]. The numbers speak for themselves and they point to discipline practices that result in the suspension of too many students and the loss of too much learning time. Parents Union, as a city-wide organization of public school parents, would like to draw attention to this disturbing problem through this report.

According to School District disciplinary policy, a temporary suspension is an "exclusion from school and all school-related activities for a period from one to three days"[3] for a student who "in the opinion of the principal,...could not work in the regular school atmosphere"[4]. It is to be a measure of last resort to be used after alternatives have been tried.

We knew from calls for advocate assistance from parents and students that in some schools suspensions were overused and that they were not measures of last resort. Furthermore, our experience working with parents and students since 1974 convinced us that:

1) Many parents did not know what rights they and their suspended child had as a result of the 1970 court order, Jones vs. Gillespie.

2) Many parents did not know procedures to follow in resolving a suspension problem.

3) Some students were suspended for lateness, chewing gum and other similar types of behavior.

4) Sometimes the letter and certainly the spirit of the 1970 Philadelphia court order, Jones vs. Gillespie and the 1975 Supreme Court decision in Goss vs. Lopez were being violated.

Our experience was supported by the statistical data. The large number of children who get suspended yearly in Philadelphia confirms the suspicion that there is a gap between disciplinary policy and its actual practice.

If overused, suspension loses its effectiveness and sends the message to the student: "We'll suspend you to get you out of our hair so we don't have to deal with your troublesome behavior". The message may even be a welcome one for a student with little incentive to attend school in the first place. Suspending a student in such a case is like throwing Br'er Rabbit into the briar patch. Meanwhile, learning as well as attendance has been suspended, and motivation could sink even lower. Parents Union is concerned.

This report, then, represents an initial step in defining the problem. In 1980, with additional staff and research support provided under a Youth Advocacy grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Parents Union began a careful analysis of the suspension data that School Districts are required to submit to the U.S. Office of Civil Rights. Each school in the system must report on a yearly basis the number, race and sex of students who have been suspended at least once. Through this analysis we found that:

- Since 1977, Philadelphia's public schools have been suspending, on the average, 14.9% of its students[5] at least once

- Since 1977, 24.9% of our secondary students, on the average, have been suspended at least once

- Overall suspension rates have increased for both minority[6] and non-minority students

- There is a disproportionate rate of suspension of minority students in some subdistricts

- Socio-economic class or race of students does not explain the high or low rates since some schools with very similar socio-economic and racial patterns had very different suspension rates.

The data did not explain why the rates were so high or so low in some schools and why there were sometimes significant changes in the rates from year to year. The data did help identify the area of suspensions as a problem. We decided that visits to schools with extreme rates or that had experienced a dramatic change from one year to another would help us understand why and how suspensions were being used.

This report presents data on the scope and nature of the suspension problem in Philadelphia public schools. It assesses information from site visits that provide clues on what could be done

to reduce the number of students who are being deprived, through suspension, of their right to a full education.

The report also raises many questions and paves the way for further research and action by School District officials and Parents Union.

Parents Union wants to work cooperatively with School District officials to reduce suspensions and develop disciplinary procedures and practices that resolve rather than exacerbate problems and that enable students and staff to pursue the school's primary educational goals. In April and May of 1982, Parents Union representatives met with the Associate Superintendent of Field Operations and with several District Superintendents to share the findings in this report and to begin the process of working together to reduce suspensions.

We are publishing this report so that parents, students, concerned citizens and School District policy makers and staff can have a clearer picture of the numbers and the reasons why students are suspended. Hopefully then, we can turn our collective attention toward bringing our suspended students back into a more positive learning environment.

This report is specifically addressed to:

1. The parents of the 35,734 students who were suspended in 1980-81 so that they can interpret their child's suspension in a broader context rather than solely the fault of their child or their parenting.

2. The parent and citizen organizations that realize that fair discipline policies foster an orderly environment in which students want to come to school and learn.

3. The School Board, central administration, principals and staff who have been vested with the power and responsibility to educate each of the 213,000 students in the Philadelphia public schools.

We invite you to read and respond to this report so that together we can work toward the goal of guaranteeing each child a full quality education.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Data provided by the Office of Civil Rights (O.C.R.)

(2) The statistics submitted to O.C.R. by the Philadelphia School District's Office of Research and Evaluation list students suspended at least once. There is no summary statistic available indicating frequency of suspensions or total number of days involved in suspensions.

(3) Discipline in the Philadelphia Public Schools. (1976) p. 17

(4) Ibid. p. 40

(5) Annual city-wide averages are:

Year	%
1977-79	12.7
1978-79	15.2
1979-80	16.1
1980-81	15.9

(6) For purposes of this report, the classification "minority" refers to American Indian, Asian, Black and Hispanic students.

BACKGROUND

The subject of school discipline generally evokes public concern and attention. "Discipline" is what both educators and administrators invariably identify as one of their top priorities. Parents and students agree that it should be a top priority. Parents, teachers, administrators and, indeed, students hold this in common: They recognize the necessity of putting in place an effective and fair set of discipline policies, procedures and practices. There is consensus in the goal of creating an orderly environment that will facilitate learning.

All the parties involved in the disciplinary process do not always agree on what exactly is effective and fair. Many youth advocacy and parent groups have claimed that expedience rather than fairness or effectiveness characterize many existing disciplinary practices. In turn, school officials have responded that their policies implement the mandate for an orderly learning environment. In the midst of this controversy are thousands of school age children whose right to a public education is curtailed by varying interpretations of what constitutes a fair discipline policy and practice.

This report focuses on the use of one of the most common disciplinary measures...the "out of school" or exclusionary suspension -- within the Philadelphia public school system. The position taken by Parents Union is that suspensions should not be used as a means of removing from school students whose behavior falls outside an unclear or arbitrary set of rules. We wholeheartedly concur with the importance of maintaining order in the classroom and in the school. We concur with the need to uphold the law and protect the rights of each individual. The illicit use of drugs, weapons and fighting cannot be condoned. We concur that the disruption of a few should not prevent the majority from learning. But dealing with the problem of school discipline in a responsible way requires that we take a serious look at the questions:

- What is the source of the problem?
- What can the school do to address the problem at its source?

Student misconduct can, and often does, reflect the profound sense of frustration that students experience when their educational needs are not met and when they,as well as their

parents are effectively cut off from the decision making process which determines the very content of their education. In this context, a principal who invokes his or her powers of exclusion is merely reinforcing the sense of powerlessness and contributing to, rather than helping to solve the problem. Until school officials resolve the problems of how to adjust the institution to meet the needs of students, rather than adjusting students to meet the needs of the institution, the issue of "discipline" is not likely to be replaced by the issue of educating as a number one priority.

A) WHAT OTHER STUDIES HAVE FOUND

In 1974 the Children's Defense Fund published a report entitled Children Out of School in America which focused on, among other things, the use and abuse of school suspensions by school authorities. The significance of the CDF report was clear enough: the widespread belief that disciplinary suspensions were limited to only a few cases, involving only the most serious incidences of misconduct, was sharply contradicted. For some groups of students, the report concluded, "suspension seems to have become a commonplace, informal and unquestioned occurrance hidden from public view".[1] An analysis of the data provided by the Office of Civil Rights revealed that, for the five states under investigation, over 150,000 children were suspended at least once during the 1972-73 school year. This represented, the report noted, one out of every 20 school age children, and a loss of more than half a million school days. Nationwide, the CDF estimated that "hundreds of thousands, even millions of children" are kept out of school through the use of suspension during the (1972-73) school year.[2]

Even more discouraging was the implication that what appeared to be a policy of wholesale exclusion had little justification in reality. From their own survey of suspended students, the Children's Defense Fund found that fully one out of every four suspensions was attendance related (lateness, truancy) and nearly two out of every three for misconduct which could not be considered dangerous. Based on findings such as these the CDF report argued that suspensions

> "are simply an easy way of avoiding a symptom rather than treating a problem. School officials have not borne the burden of showing exclusion to be necessary, as opposed to merely convenient."[3]

These findings were corroborated by a 1979 study of suspensions in eighty-two school districts in Ohio.

The root of the problem might well be the arbitrariness of the process by which suspension policies are formulated, adopted and executed by School District officials. In their interviews with school district authorities, researchers for the CDF found that discipline codes for the schools in their study were rarely developed in any careful, systematic way. Often the codes were not articulated in writing or verbally, and when they were articulated, they were insulated from any criticism, modification or rejection by the parent/student/school community. In school districts with centralized administrations, policies governing the use of suspensions in local schools were sometimes so unclear as to be meaningless. The result is that they remained the prerogatives of principals who decided:

> "what constitutes an offense, which offense is to be punished, by what means, and with what results."[4]

Just two years after the CDF study was released, Statewide Youth Advocacy of New York reported on school district suspension practices throughout New York State. The findings and conclusion echoed those of the Children's Defense Fund. The numbers were alarming and the justification for them was weak. Of the fifty districts the Project surveyed in 1976, 16 suspended more than 10% of all of their secondary school children, 9 districts more than 15%, and in 2 districts more than 20%. Forty-four percent of the principals interviewed by the Project said that they suspended for truancy, 55% suspended for cutting class, 78% suspended for smoking, and 98% for "insubordination". "The vast majority of suspensions in New York State", the report concluded, "are in the first category (of the State Education Law Section 3214) - i.e. 'insubordination' and 'disobedience'. These words are subject to such wide ranging differences in interpretation that they appear to be constitutionally deficient, although no court has ruled that way so far".

The kinds of suspension practices described in all these studies are, at the very least, of questionable legality. They also point to a use of exclusionary suspensions that is excessive and, thus, susceptible to losing its effectiveness.

B) WHAT THE COURTS HAVE ESTABLISHED

It is within the American tradition to resort to the judicial community to define the content and the process by which our individual rights are protected. If the studies suggest, as they do, that there is a problem in the use of suspensions, then it merits our attention to review what the Courts have considered to be the proper and lawful use of suspensions.

Two particular decisions are of importance here. In Goss vs. Lopez (95 S. Ct. 729; 1975) the right of students to due process in all suspension cases was established. The Supreme Court established that a suspension is, in effect, the denial of access to a public education which is guaranteed by the state. The Court distinguished between 1) a "simple, short term suspension" of less than ten days involving no dispute, 2) an "unusual short term suspension" of less than ten days involving a dispute, and 3) a "long term suspension or expulsion".

The Court held that in the cases of "simple short term suspensions", a student should be adequately protected against erroneous accusations. This involves an effective notification of the suspension, an explanation of the evidence, and the opportunity to explain oneself. In the case of an "unusual" suspension, the Court argued that reasonable procedures should be invoked, although it was ambiguous as to what constitutes a reasonable procedure. In the event of a long term suspension or expulsion, the Court held that a formal procedure "may" be required, but, again, it was ambiguous on what constitutes formal.

The problem inherent in the Goss vs. Lopez decision is that although the Court established the right to due process in the event of a suspension, it was ambiguous in its terminology.

In Jones vs. Gillespie (Philadelphia, Pa. 1970) the process by which a student is suspended is spelled out in greater detail. In February, 1970, Lewis Jones, a student at Strawbery Mansion Jr. High School filed a Complaint of Equity "in behalf of himself and all others similarily situated". His lawyers argued that it was the policy of the School District of Philadelphia to suspend students without written notice, without informing them or their parents of their due process

rights, and to suspend indefinitely without formal hearings. During the course of the litigation of Jones vs. Gillespie, the School District of Philadelphia was twice cited in contempt of court. Despite explicit orders of the court, in April of 1972. directing the Philadelphia School District to discontinue the practice of suspending without written notice and for more than five days, testimony given 6 months later revealed that "the orders were never complied with. No written notice is given to a child informing him that he is entitled to a hearing when suspended. There are no guidelines with regard to the duration of the suspension."[6]

Judge Lois Forer decided in favor of Jones, ordering that every student, and the parent of every student who is suspended, be informed in writing of the reason for the suspension, and that they be notified of their procedural rights granted by law. Furthermore, the Court ruled that a suspension exceeding five (5) days without a formal hearing was a violation of a student's individual rights. It also established the following:

1) A student's right to return to school following the fifth day of suspension unless a hearing is held prior to the sixth day by the School's Student Discipline Committee.

2) A ruling by the Student Discipline Committee recommending a suspension of over five days must be followed by a due process hearing before the School Board or a committee officially designated by the Board.

3) If such proceedings do not take place, the student must be allowed to return to school one (1) calendar week after the fifth day of the suspension.

In summary, then, the judicial community has established the right to due process in the event of a suspension and has delineated those procedures that must be maintained in the practice of suspensions. The critical issue in these decisions is that although they establish the mechanism by which suspensions may be levied, they do not in fact resolve the problem of what constitutes a fair, reasonable and legitimate suspension.

If we resort to State Law to shed more light on this issue, we find that State Law is equally vague. We quote,

> "School rules are assumed to be reasonable until they are rescinded or waived. Students, therefore, should obey school rules while working through channels to help change those of which they do not approve."[7]

To illustrate the problem further, if a student is suspended for chronic lateness, the Courts tell us that there are mechanisms that must be followed in order to give out the suspension. It is silent on whether a suspension in this case is fair, reasonable or legal. If we look at State Law governing this issue, we find that we can assume it is reasonable until it is waived or rescinded. It is then that we have to draw from the discipline guidelines governing the School District of Philadelphia to find the policy concerning suspensions.

C) WHAT THE PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL DISTRICT HAS SAID...

At the time that this report was being drawn, the document in operation delineating the policy, practices and procedures governing discipline in Philadelphia's schools was the Discipline in Philadelphia; a Working Document (1976).

This document represents a monumental effort to define and clarify discipline policy for our schools. Since its initial publication, the document has been revised once and this revised draft is being circulated presently to draw input from the community at large. But since the 1976 version of the document contained those policies, practices and procedures operating at the time of this study, this is the document that we must turn to in order to find answers.

- POLICY

The 1976 Working Document opens with a statement that clarifies its policy on discipline. It is couched in terms that emphasize the positive aspects of discipline. In fact, the Document is clear in the understanding that "there can be no statements on discipline without mention of sound basic principles of good classroom management; without some discourse on a realistic and

relevant curriculum; without indication of the responsibilities of everyone who plays a part, directly or indirectly, in the instructional program; or without references to the forces, institutions, and people who share in molding the minds and personalities of young people. It is an oversimplification to expect that overt acts of disruption and violence can be dealt with effectively by a list of prescriptive punishments. Effective solutions to disruption must address themselves to the causes and climate of unacceptable behavior in addition to suggestions of punitive remedies".[8]

Thus stating its policy on Discipline at the onset, the authors of the Document then move to define the roles and functions of those actors involved in the disciplinary process.

If the policy on discipline is clear, the policy on suspensions is vague. The policy is that the principal is the interpreter of discipline in his/her school. Furthermore, in reference to suspensions, the 1976 Working Document further states,

> "The administration in our schools reserves the right to use 'out of school suspension' for instances where, in the opinion of the principal, the student could not work in the regular school atmosphere, eliminating the need to leave a disruptor in the classroom, even temporarily, to infringe upon the educational rights of his fellow students."[9]

What, then, constitutes a disruption? On page eleven of the Document are listed a code of nine rules whose infraction constitutes "serious student misconduct". They are:

1) Disruption of the school
2) Damage, destruction, theft of school property
3) Damage, destruction, or theft of private property
4) Assault on a school employee
5) Physical abuse of a student or other person not employed by the school
6) Weapons and dangerous instruments
7) Narcotics, alcoholic beverages and stimulant drugs
8) Repeated school violations
9) Disruptive and/or offensive use of language

School District Policy, then, is that these student behaviors constitute serious misconduct, and that although they are punishable, "a school is not restricted to any one form of punishment for any one offense."[10]

Hence, the recurring question: when is suspension to be used?

- PRACTICE

"Not restricted to any one form of punishment" can mean several things. One is that the invitation is there, and certainly the freedom, to be creative in the practice of discipline. Likewise, the phrase can be a "catch all clause" legitimizing the indiscriminate use of suspensions. The 1976 Working Document prescribes a list of measures that could be taken in the event of a disciplinary infraction.[11] They are:

- student interview with the principal and/or designated disciplinarian
- temporary assignment to a discipline room, or "cooling off" area, if available
- after-school detentions
- deprivation of privileges
- a letter or phone call to the parent
- placing the student on daily report
- in-house suspension if administratively possible
- reassignment or re-rostering of the student
- temporary suspension of the student
- financial restitution for acts of vandalism to school property
- assignment to an alternative program for disruptive students
- request for a lateral transfer of the student
- request for a remedial disciplinary transfer of the student
- request for expulsion of the student

Although listed in numerical order, no where is it indicated that they are to be followed in sequence. It is conceivable, then, and within the guidelines, that the most expedient form of punishment rather than the most beneficial will be used by the principal and not be challenged.

There is a word of caution in the Document about the excessive use of suspensions. It states:

> "Suspension, if used wisely, is an effective tool in dealing with disciplinary problems; and, as with all other forms of punishment, if over-used or used without discretion its effectiveness becomes diminished".[12]

It seems to us, that both the policy on discipline and its practice need to emphasize the seriousness of "out of school" suspensions and that as one of the most serious punishments, it should be reserved for the most serious offenses.

-PROCEDURE

It is in the area of procedures that the 1976 Working Document is most explicit. This area is where the Court decisions have had the greatest impact. The 1976 Working Document is clear and specific in mandating that "due process be observed in all instances".[13]

It emphasizes the steps to be followed in issuing a suspension. It unequivocably describes those steps to ensure due process. There is no question that the recipe for due process is clearly stated - ensuring a student's right to a hearing and providing those mechanisms by which suspensions will be recorded.[14]

But, the essential question remains: what constitutes a fair suspension?[15] Can we say, then, that if a student is suspended for lateness, or chewing gum, or wearing his hat to school it is fair if the procedures for giving out a suspension have been followed? Since the Court decisions have been vague on this issue, since State Law is ambiguous, and since the School District policy delegates this decision to the principal, we must then look at the policies and practices in our schools, as expressed through the individual school codes, to find out why children could be suspended.

D) WHAT THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS MAINTAIN...

Given the process by which policy (or absence of same) is delegated throughout the system, the handbooks for 72 schools were examined on the premise that through them, there would be an indication of the range and type of behaviors that elicited disciplinary action in the individual schools. The sample of handbooks represent schools with differing rates of suspensions. Included were handbooks from schools with very high rates,

schools that had no suspensions and schools that changed their rates from one year to next. We were motivated to find out what kinds of behaviors were considered serious enough to warrant disciplinary action and potentially, a suspension.

- Elementary Schools

At the elementary school level, the handbook is primarily written for the benefit of the parent. Most handbooks contained a paragraph explaining the code of behavior for the school.

After reviewing this code of behavior, we drew a list of all those behaviors which were listed in the various handbooks as punishable. They are:

lateness
unexcused absences
truancy
parental neglect (it was unclear if a child was to be disciplined for this)
illegal employment
disobedience
chewing gum
littering the halls or grounds
leaving the grounds without permission
loitering
failure to complete assignments
disrespect
inappropriate language
passive resistance
lunchroom disorder
lateness for lines
unexcused use of bathroom
not paying attention
improper use of time
improper behavior
deterrent activities
fist fighting
asking for money
bad manners
calling out
refusing to work
sparring, karate
disinterested work attitudes

No where in the handbooks reviewed were definitions available for each of these items. The range and variety of unacceptable behavior was wide and raises a number of questions regarding their appropriateness.

Suspensions, at the elementary level, seem to be reserved for repeated violations, or repeated misconduct. The process by which a child is suspended in the primary grade is not clear or consistent in the handbooks. One school with low suspension rates had very explicit steps listed before a child would be suspended. One school explicitly referred to the "cooling off room" as an alternative to continued discipline infraction.

None of the handbooks reviewed contained instructions for the parent in the event of a suspension, and this was a surprising omission, since, there are options for the parent to reinstate the child.

- JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

The quality of the handbooks for this age group are varied. Two junior high school handbooks reviewed have very detailed descriptions of disciplinary policy and practice. One school with a large Spanish speaking population had its handbook in both English and Spanish. One school with an unusually high suspension rate did not have a handbook at all. Another school had developed a disciplinary handbook separate from the school's handbook.

Two handbooks had introductions that described and defined the roles of the teacher, the parent, the student and the counsellor. One handbook explained the rationale for unacceptable behavior. It admonished the teacher, "Be sensitive to changing behavior patterns" and further cautioned "Some disciplinary problems are caused by academic frustration, inadequate teaching and insensitive relations".

Overall, at the junior high level, students who displayed the following behaviors in addition to those infractions listed in the Code of Serious Student Misconduct, could expect some form of punishment:

lateness
carrying coats
disruption of locker ethics
loitering
bringing babies or relatives to school
graffitti
radios
wearing hats
hijacking
shakedown
cutting class
using phones in the classroom
setting off fire alarms
failure to appear at detention

Again, as in the elementary level, there were no definitions of these infractions, and it is the repeated violation of the school code that is the spark plug for issuing a suspension.

- SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

At this level, the handbooks displayed the most consistency. The majority of them were written for the student and in collaboration with students and parents. Two handbooks contained detailed sections describing the Student's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

One handbook defined types of behavior and the disciplinary action that a student could expect from engaging in these behaviors. This handbook was explicit in defining what constituted a minor offense, a repeated offense and a serious offense.

The list of infractions that would not be acceptable at the secondary school level included:

bomb threats
blackmail
extortion
sexual assault
selling drugs
forgery
wearing hats
gambling
carrying radios and tapes

What can be seen then, is that there is a wide range of behaviors listed in school handbooks that can elicit

corrective action. What seems to be the common practice is the use of suspension for repeated acts of misconduct stated in the handbooks as well as for the serious offense. Perhaps what is evident at the surface is the wide variety of unacceptable behaviors at all levels, but one cannot overlook the absurdity in the content of many of them. At the elementary level, what is "illegal employment?" At the secondary level, the punishment for vandalism is the same as for wearing a hat to class.

Because the policy at all levels of the system does not clearly define a suspendable offense, kids are getting suspended for a wide range of "unacceptable behaviors".

CONCLUSIONS

In this section of our report we have drawn a background from national research, Court decisions, State Law, School Board policy and finally individual school policy to describe the context in which we can understand the high rates of suspensions in Philadelphia.

The Courts tell us that suspensions may be used if the procedures for issuing them followed due process. Likewise, State Law requires that the procedures for the use of suspensions be rigorously followed, and shifts the responsibility of stating what is a fair suspension to the individual school districts. Once we arrive at the School District, we again find clear guidelines on the procedure for issuing a suspension, but the responsibility for administering and determining what is a fair suspension is delegated to the principal of the school. And, finally, when we look at the written expression of discipline in the individual schools, we get the message: It is all right to suspend Johnny or Judy for offenses like repeated lateness as long as due process is maintained.

We pose the following questions; is it indeed wise practice to suspend a student for the repetition of a minor offense such as lateness? Given the magnitude of the number of suspended students in 1980-81, is the Philadelphia School District's policy on suspension (or lack of thereof) too ambiguous? And given the power that the principal has as the major interpreter of disciplinary policy, shouldn't there be a system of checks and balances that would insure an appropriate and consistent use of suspensions?

FOOTNOTES

(1) CDF, Children Out of School in America (1974), p. 117

(2) Ibid. p. 118

(3) Ibid. p. 145

(4) Ibid. p. 139

(5) Statewide Youth Advocacy Project, Failing Students - Failing Schools (1978), p. 76

(6) Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia Opinion and Order. (Jones vs. Gillespie) p. 2

(7) State Board of Education, "Student Rights and Responsibilities" (1974), Sec. 12.2 d:4

(8) School District of Philadelphia, Discipline in the Philadelphia Public Schools, a Working Document (1976) (Emphasis added)

(9) Ibid. p. 40. (Emphasis added)

(10) Ibid. p. 9 (Emphasis added)

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid. p. 40

(13) Ibid. p. 9

(14) Ibid. pp. 17-21

(15) This issue is still not clarified in the revised version of the 1976 Working Document.

Our Data, Methods and Findings

Our experience with parents and students suggested that suspensions were frequently used as a disciplinary tool, and that sometimes the practice was abused. It was necessary to test our hypothesis within a larger framework, guided by three major questions:

- How frequently are suspensions used in the city?
- Does the use of suspensions vary from school to school?
- Why are students being suspended from school?

Our strategy was a two stage one. To the best of our knowledge, no one had systematically examined the suspension data for the Philadelphia Schools. So our intention was, first, to document the extent to which suspensions were used as a disciplinary measure by analyzing both the district-wide and school-by-school rates of suspension; and second, to employ the school-by-school suspension data as a guide to identifying those schools that had either very high or very low suspension rates, as well as schools where the rate of suspension had dramatically changed over the last two years. After identifying schools in this manner, we arranged site visits and conducted interviews with key personnel in the school. We hoped to understand where and how frequently suspensions were used, as well as alternative school policies, practices and procedures that contributed to an orderly learning environment.

The suspension data were readily available to us. The Office of Civil Rights had targeted the Philadelphia School District for a possible investigation into discriminatory patterns of discipline. Beginning in the 1977-1978 school year, every principal was required to report to the central administration the number of students that were suspended at least once during the school year, broken down by race and sex. For the 1979-80 and 1980-81 school years, and for every school for which data were available, we linked the numbers of students suspended to the appropriate enrollment figures, as well as to other school characteristics such as the proportion of the student enrollment from families on aid to families with dependent children, student and teacher absentee rates, and the California Achievement Test scores. As a result, we were able to calculate the overall suspension rates (total suspensions/total enrollment) the suspension rates for white students (number of whites suspended/white enrollment), and the non-white suspension rates (number of non-whites suspended/non-white enrollment) for the entire district and for the individual schools, as well as to compare variations in these rates across schools with similar or dissimilar characteristics.

The names of schools with their suspension rates are not provided in this report. The purpose of the report is to focus on the overall picture, to get some perspective on the magnitude of a problem that exists city-wide, rather than to single out individual schools because of their particularly high suspension rate. Our strategy here is consistent with our larger goal of working constructively with school district officials -- for system-wide intervention and change that will lead to a set of disciplinary policies, practices and procedures that are both fair and effective.

We will make the lists of schools and their suspension rates available for anyone interested, upon request and after consultation. The Parents Union wants to make sure that the information is not misused or misinterpreted. All data in its original form is available from the School District's Department of Research and Evaluation.

The Data District-Wide: Rates and Patterns

Table 1 reveals that district-wide there was a total of 142,055 students suspended at least once in the four-year period beginning in 1977-78 and ending in the 1980-81 school year. This represents an average of 35,514 suspensions per school year. Using the very conservative assumptions that each student was in fact suspended only once and that each suspension was for a period of only 2 days (the temporary suspension is up to 3 days), this means that on the average more than 70,000 instructional school days per year were lost as a result of disciplinary suspensions.[1]

The raw numbers are astonishing. Calculating the rates of suspension will allow us to see what proportion of the student population is affected by the numbers and to compare the impact across different categories with different student populations. In the Philadelphia School District, on an average and over the same four-year period, 15% of all students, 16.8% of all minority students,[2] and 10.08% of all non-minority students were suspended at least once during the school year. The patterns and changes in the rates are depicted graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1 reveals a general, though uneven pattern of increase over the past four years. Overall, the district's suspension rate increased by 3.2 percentage points (from 12.7% to 15.9%). For minority students, the increase was greater (3.7 percentage points) than for non-minority white students (1.5 percentage points). In 1980-81, the district's non-white suspension rate

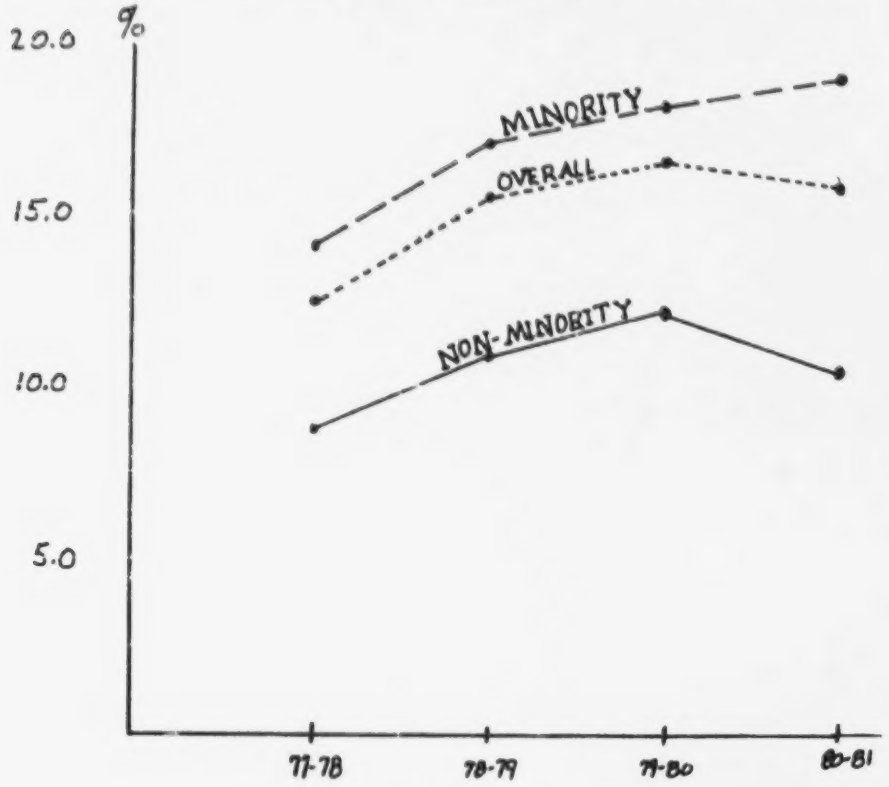
TABLE 1

NUMBER SUSPENDED & NUMBER SUSPENDED AS PERCENT OF ENROLLMENT

	1977-78		1978-79		1979-80		1980-81	
	NO.	% of Enroll.	NO.	% of Enroll.	NO.	% of Enroll.	NO.	% of Enroll.
OVERALL	31,877	(12.7)	37,039	(15.2)	37,405	(16.1)	35,734	(15.9)
MINORITY	24,564	(14.3)	28,839	(17.1)	29,060	(17.8)	28,755	(18.0)
NON-MINORITY	7,313	(9.3)	8,200	(10.8)	8,345	(12.1)	6,979	(10.8)

FIGURE 1

PERCENT OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED BY YEAR

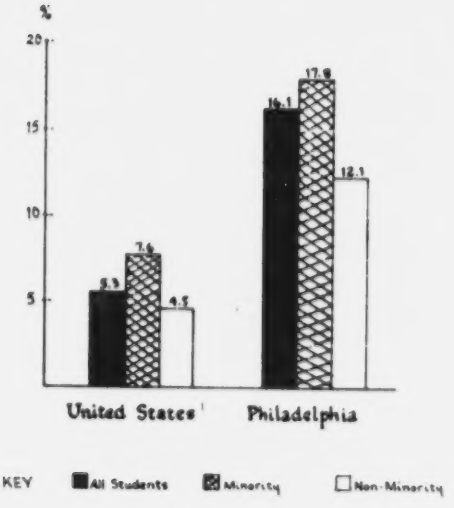


was the highest in 1980-81 (18%) of all four years. Likewise, the difference between this non-white rate of 18% and white rate of 10.8% represented the largest discrepancy in the rates of suspension of all the years for which data were available.

These rates of suspension, for both minority and non-minority students, appear high when compared to the national rates. Figure 2 compares the Philadelphia School District data and data for the United States as a whole for the 1979-80 school year, the most recent year for which the national data were available. Minority students in Philadelphia are suspended at a rate that is 2 times the rate for minorities nationwide, and non-minority students are suspended at a rate that is almost 3 times the national rate for that group.

FIGURE 2

PERCENTAGE of NON-MINORITY, MINORITY & ALL STUDENTS SUSPENDED, UNITED STATES & PHILADELPHIA FOR 1979-80 SCHOOL YEAR



1. From Office for Civil Rights, Dept. of Education, "1980 Elementary and Secondary Schools Civil Rights Survey, National Summaries", March 1982; Table 1, "National Summary of Projected Data".

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The rates of suspension differed markedly by school level. Figure 3 shows the results when the suspension rates are calculated separately for elementary and secondary schools. Over the four year period the suspension rate for secondary schools in the Philadelphia School District averaged 24.9% compared to 6.3% for elementary schools. The patterns described above generally hold when the data are examined within school levels. For both elementary and secondary schools there is an increase in the use of suspensions, as well as evidence of increasing racial disproportionality in the rates of suspension. In contrast to the rates of suspension for non-minority students, the suspension rates for both minority students in elementary schools and minority students in secondary schools reached their highest point in the 1980-81 school year.

FIGURE 3
MINORITY, NON-MINORITY & OVERALL
RATES OF SUSPENSION BY SCHOOL LEVEL
FOR 1977-78, 1978-79, 1979-80 & 1980-81

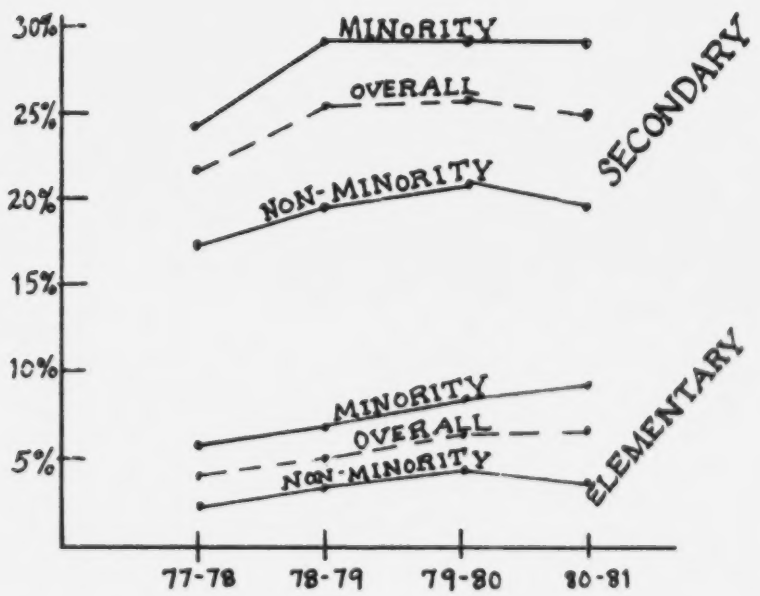

TABLE 2

PERCENT OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED BY SCHOOL LEVEL

		77-78	78-79	79-80	80-81
SECONDARY	OVERALL	22.3	25.4	26.1	25.6
	MINORITY	24.3	27.9	27.9	28.2
	NON-MINORITY	17.1	19.4	21.5	18.7
ELEMENTARY	OVERALL	4.2	5.8	6.8	7.0
	MINORITY	5.1	6.9	8.0	8.3
	NON-MINORITY	2.3	3.5	4.0	4.0

Most notable is the sheer magnitude of the numbers for both minority and non-minority secondary school students. In 1980-81, 25.6% or more than one out of every four secondary school students were suspended at least once. For minority students the situation was even worse: 28.2% were suspended at least once during the 1980-81 school year.

In Table 3 the data have been disaggregated again and the overall, minority and non-minority rates of suspension have been summarized according to the subdistricts. In Figure 4 we have mapped out the rates for each district for all four years. Although we will not enter into a detailed discussion of this data here, it should be pointed out that there are substantial differences in the rates of suspension between districts and that within each district there is considerable fluctuation in suspension rates over time. In addition the following trends appear noteworthy:

1. The pattern of the city-wide overall increase in the rate of suspension is repeated in all seven of the city's subdistricts.

2. With the possible exception of Districts 5 and 6, there are marked differences between the rates of suspension for minority and non-minority students. Minority students consistantly, over time, were suspended at rates that were much higher than those for non-minority students.

3. There was a sharp increase in the rates of suspension for minority students in District 8 from the 1977-78 to the 1978-79 school year which was not accompanied by a similar increase for non-minority students.

This was precisely the time period when many of the schools in District 8 received minority students as a result of the School District's desegregation efforts. It suggests that desegregation -- and all that the attempts to desegregate might lead to in terms of discriminatory responses -- is one factor that has contributed to the racial disproportionality in the suspension rates. The patterns of racial disproportionality at all levels, and the reasons for them, are matters that deserve further research.

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TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED

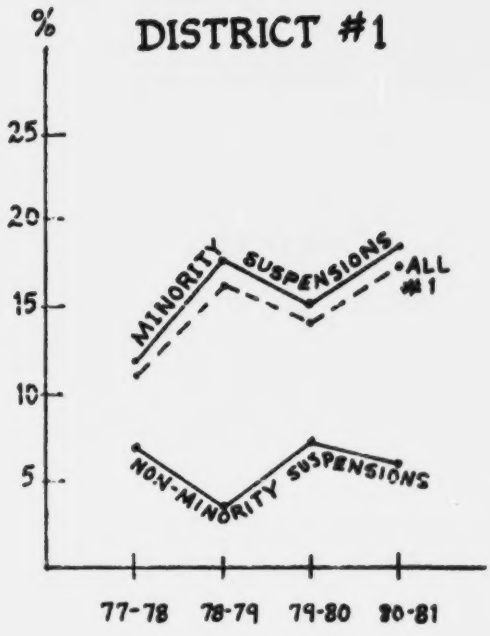
BY DISTRICT

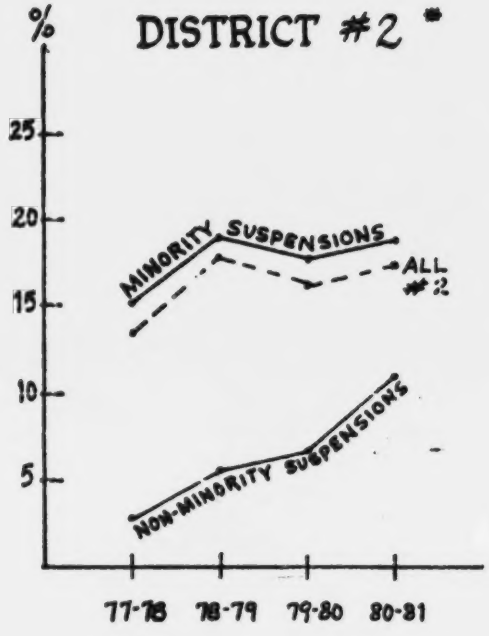
1977-78 to 1980-81

DISTRICT	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1977-78 to 1980-81 CHANGE
ALL STUDENTS					
1	11.6	16.2	15.1	17.0	(+5.4)
2	13.7	17.5	16.0	17.7	(+4.0)
4	15.5	16.1	19.7	18.1	(+2.6)
5	13.7	16.4	16.8	15.5	(+1.8)
6	12.2	12.4	13.2	17.5	(+5.3)
7	12.7	13.6	15.5	13.7	(+1.0)
8	9.1	10.3	11.2	11.7	(+2.6)
MINORITY STUDENTS					
1	12.3	17.5	15.9	17.9	(+5.6)
2	14.9	18.9	17.1	19.9	(+5.0)
4	15.9	16.7	20.3	18.6	(+2.7)
5	13.3	17.2	17.9	16.2	(+2.9)
6	13.2	12.5	13.4	18.7	(+5.5)
7	17.9	16.7	19.1	16.3	(-1.6)
8	12.3	22.9	17.4	17.6	(+5.3)
NON-MINORITY STUDENTS					
1	6.2	3.6	6.2	5.7	(+ .5)
2	3.4	5.6	6.0	11.5	(8.1)
4	5.7	4.3	5.6	6.6	(+0.9)
5	14.7	14.6	14.2	13.4	(-1.3)
6	7.7	12.3	12.0	11.7	(+4.0)
7	8.4	10.7	11.7	10.1	(+1.7)
8	8.9	9.0	10.2	10.7	(+1.8)

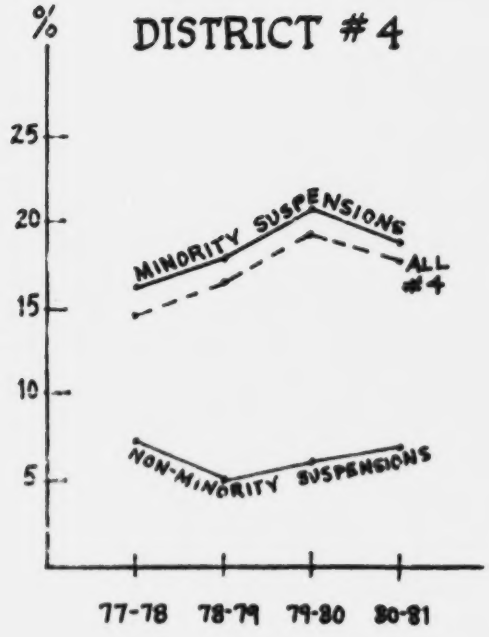
FIGURE 4

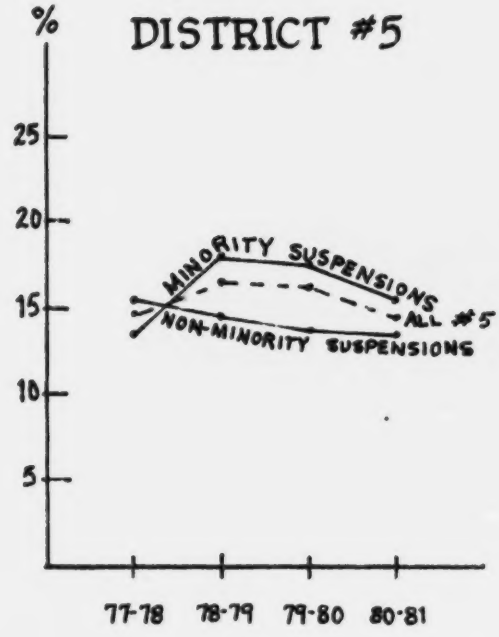
DISTRICT SUSPENSION RATES 1977 – 1981

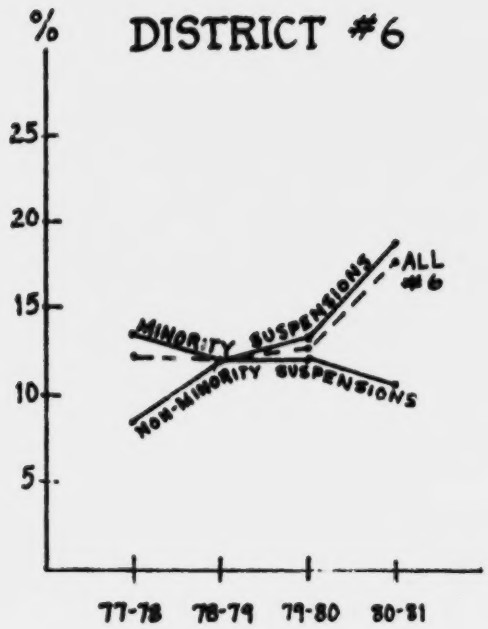


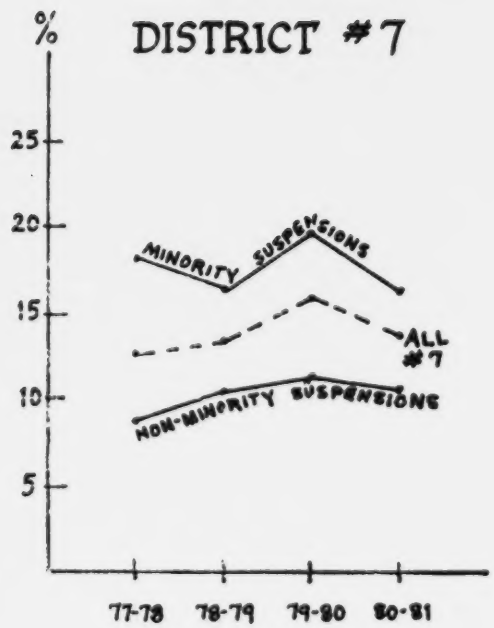


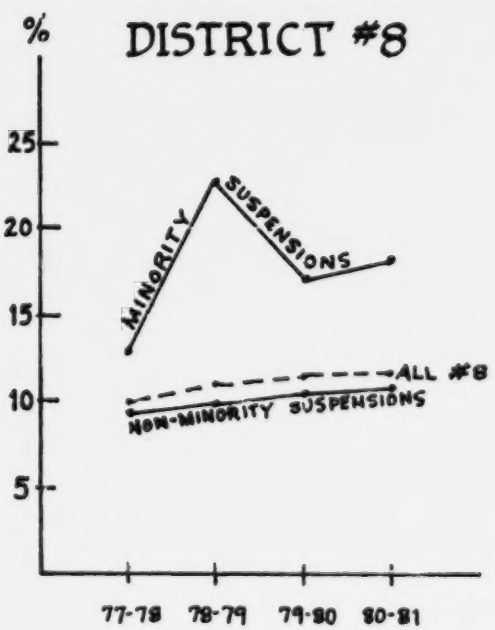
*combined with District 3 in 80-81






%
DISTRICT #6
25
20
15
10
5
MINORITY SUSPENSIONS
ALL #6
NON-MINORITY SUSPENSIONS
77-78
78-79
79-80
80-81


%
DISTRICT #7
25
20
15
10
5
MINORITY SUSPENSIONS
ALL #7
NON-MINORITY SUSPENSIONS
77-78
78-79
79-80
80-81


%
DISTRICT #8
25
20
15
10
5
MINORITY SUSPENSIONS
ALL #8
NON-MINORITY SUSPENSIONS
77-78
78-79
79-80
80-81

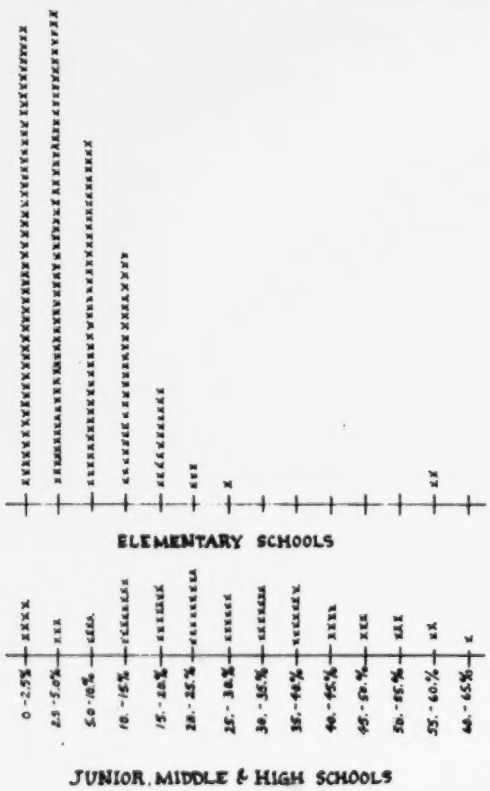
School-by-School Suspension Rates

Because of the massive amount of data involved, we examined individual school rates of suspension for only the two most recent school years for which data were available (1979-1980; 1980-1981). Also, in order to make more meaningful comparisons, we have eliminated from this analysis the schools classified by the School District as "special", including disciplinary and special education schools, and schools for the handicapped.

The data for the 1980-81 school year are presented in Figure 5 in the form of a modified histogram. Elementary and secondary schools are plotted separately, but exactly the same scale was used so that the distributions could be easily compared. Each of the "X"s in the columns represents a single school, and each "X" was placed in the appropriate column, the range of which (labeled at bottom) included the actual suspension rate of the school.

FIGURE 5

DISTRIBUTIONS OF 1980-81 SUSPENSION RATES



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The distribution of school suspension rates reveals a striking pattern: in some schools, suspensions are virtually non-existent, while in others, suspension appears to be a very common occurrence. Of the 68 secondary schools in this study, 34, or exactly one-half, suspended 25% or more of their students at least once during the school year. Of these, 13 suspended 40% or more of their students at least once, and 6 schools suspended 50% or more of their student population at least once. One junior high school suspended 63% of its student population during the year. In contrast, we found that there were 7 secondary schools that suspended fewer than 5% of the students; and that in 4 of these, less than 2.4% of the student population was suspended during the year.

The distribution of suspension rates for elementary schools (top, Fig. 5) for the 1980-81 school looks radically different, as expected, reflecting generally lower rates among the lower grades. Overall there is less variation in the rates, but still the patterns are revealing. Of the 184 elementary schools for which 1980-81 data were available[3], 41 suspended more than 10% of their students at least once, and 17 elementary schools suspended 15% or more of their students at least once. According to the School District's figures, two elementary schools actually suspended more than 55% of their student populations at least once during the 1980-81 school year.

Again, the contrast here is noteworthy. Many elementary schools suspended only a small proportion of their students. In fact, in 50 of the 184 elementary schools, less than 2.5% of the students were suspended during the 1980-1981 school year.

To facilitate identification and comparision of schools, we have displayed the 1980-81 suspension rates graphically in Figures 5 and 6. In Figures 5 and 6, schools were plotted horizontally according to the district in which they are located, and vertically according to the actual proportion of the student population that was suspended at least once during the school year. Schools with the highest suspension rates can easily be compared with other schools in the same district, as well as with schools in other districts, with lower suspension rates. What we should make note of here is that even within districts there is wide variation in the use of suspension. The highest and lowest rates of suspension in each district are given in the parenthesis. For secondary schools (Fig. 5) in District 1, for example, the suspension rates range from 0% for one school all the way up to 63% for another. The suspension rates for other schools in the district are for the most part evenly distributed in between. Similarly there is a wide range in the rates for Districts 2, 4, 5 and 6. Even in Districts 7 and 8 the variation is considerable, though less that that in the other districts.

FIGURE 5

1980-81 SECONDARY SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATES

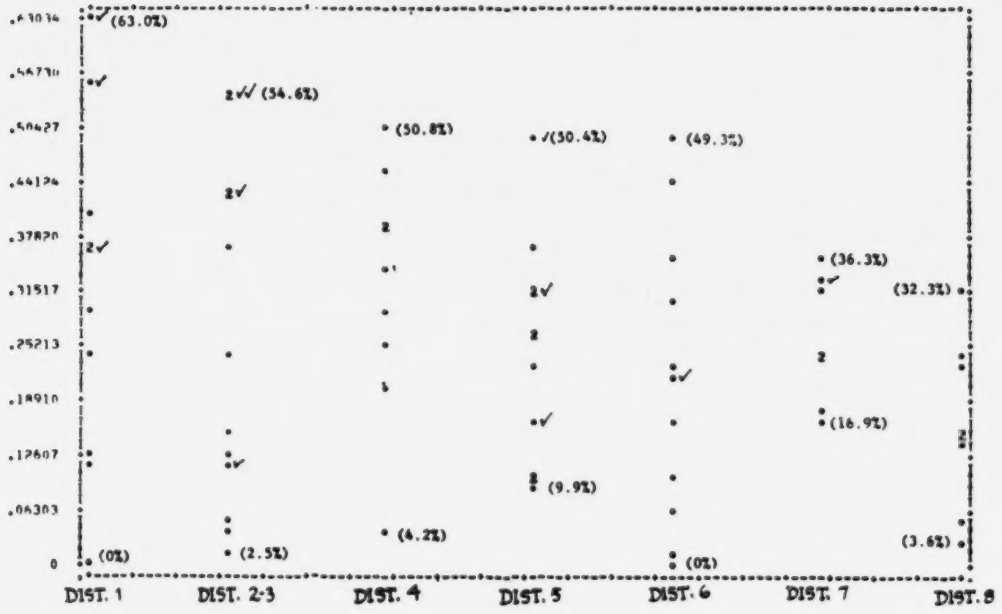
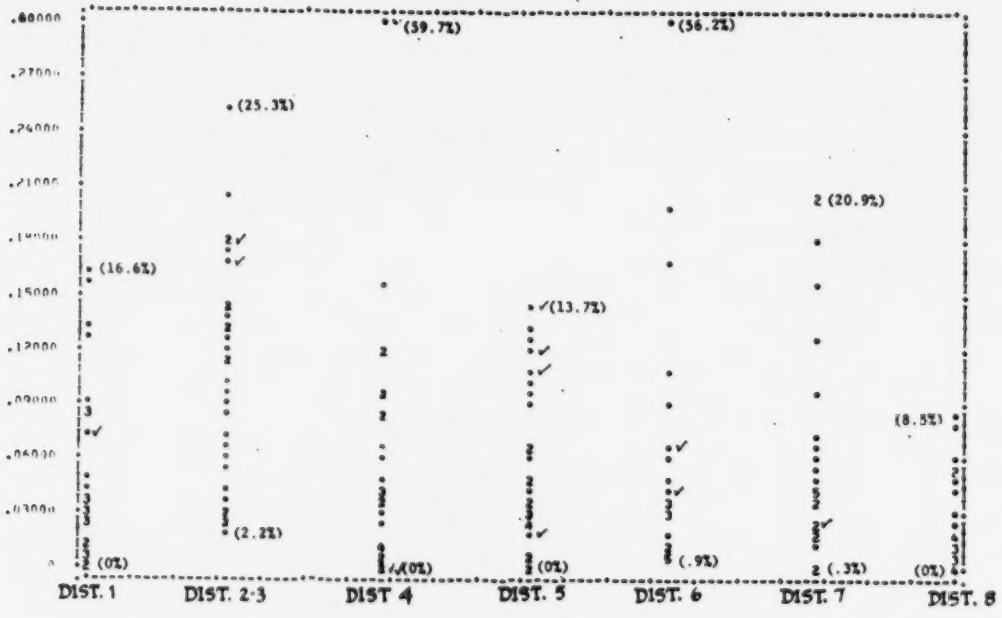


FIGURE 6

1980-81 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATES



Star (*) indicates 1 school

A number (2 thru 5) indicates the actual number of schools

Highest and lowest rates of suspension for each district are given in parentheses

A check (✓) indicates a school where a site visit was conducted by Parents Union

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For the elementary schools (Fig. 6), much the same is true. With the possible exception of District 8, the degree to which the elementary school rates vary within districts is quite remarkable. Even in District 8 the percentage of students suspended ranges from 0% to 8.5%.

Documenting the stability or instability of the rates of suspension for individual schools was important for us since we wanted to identify for site visits those schools where significant policy or personnel changes might have occurred. When we examined the patterns over the two-year period for which we had data (1979-80 and 1980-81), we found that significant changes did in fact take place. Of the 235 schools for which data were available for both years, 13 (4 elementary and 9 secondary) schools showed a suspension rate that was more than 10 percentage points greater in 1980-81 than in 1979-80. Of those 7 (six secondary and 1 elementary) schools increased their suspension rate by more than 15 percentage points. One elementary school increased its rate of suspension by about 52 percentage points--from a 1979-80 rate of 4.3% to a 1980-81 rate of 56.2%. The other side of the coin is that in 18 (11 secondary and 7 elementary) schools, the rate of suspension decreased by more than 10% over the two-year period, and in 9 (6 secondary and 3 elementary schools) the suspension rate was reduced by more than 15 percentage points. One senior high school actually showed a 1980-81 rate of suspension that was 51 percentage points below its 1979-80 rate.

One possible argument of course, is that the variations and patterns in the suspension rates among individual schools discussed above represent different and perhaps appropriate responses of the schools to the different problems that they face. Since some schools have more "bad" students than others, they need to suspend more often. It seems to us, however, that the variations that we observed are too great and cannot be explained away that easily. First, our analysis revealed that many of the schools, when matched for similar characteristics still had widely dissimilar suspension rates. Second, the dramatic changes in so many of the schools over a two-year period suggested to us (since it is highly unlikely that any conceivable transition in the student population could account for such changes) that at the level of the individual school, the use of suspension to a large extent is a policy matter, subject to the principal's discretion. The interviews with the principals and school personnel begin to flesh out some of these questions and concerns.

FOOTNOTES

1. Under the guidelines provided by the Office for Civil Rights, the School District collects data only on the number of students suspended at least once during the school year. Therefore, the data has limitations. It is possible to determine only the number of individuals that were suspended, not the total number of suspensions for each school. Since an unknown number of students are suspended more than once, the figures underestimate the frequency of the use of suspension.

   Also, the length of each suspension is not reported, so the number of instructional days lost as a result of suspensions cannot be precisely calculated.

2. Minority refers to the 70% of the student population (approximate) that is defined by the School District as either American Indian, Black, Hispanic or Asian. Non-minority students are students defined by the School District as "other" or white.

3. No data were reported for Masterman, Hanna, or Jefferson.

WHAT THE STATISTICS DO NOT TELL US

Statistics, by themselves, can be dangerous in that they present a picture of reality devoid of explanations. The data serves its purpose by telling us how many students are suspended on a yearly basis. They do not tell us the reasons behind those suspensions. The data used in this study pointed to a trend -- and none of the variables used in the statistical analysis were sufficient to explain why some schools had high rates or low rates or what accounted for the substantial change in rates from one year to the next in some schools.

A second major part of our research was to visit those schools with high or low suspension rates or where significant change had taken place in the two year span. Our concern during this phase of the study was to identify and describe school characteristics associated with the different rates of suspensions. If the statistical analysis of the data suggested some patterns in the use of suspensions as a disciplinary measure, it was hoped the interviews and site visits would provide us with the context in which to interpret those patterns.

- SCHOOLS WITH LOW RATES OF SUSPENSIONS

There are schools in Philadelphia which have a similar student population as schools with high rates of suspensions, but where suspensions are virtually not used as a means of disciplining students. Many of these schools had a 'no suspension' policy. What was characteristic of these schools was the degree of community and parental involvement in the school. These schools had linkages into the community that reached far. This linkage had been facilitated in many schools by the presence of the School-Community Coordinator, funded through Title I, whose function was to maintain and nurture that bond between home and school. Also undergirding the discipline policies at these schools was the personal belief of the principal in the importance of instruction and, therefore, of the student's presence in class. These schools had a variety of educational programs to meet different educational needs of various students.

Suspensions, in these schools, were measures of last resort to be used only when all else had failed -- and even then, to be used with great caution.

The triple combination of community involvement, school emphasis on instruction rather than control, and a student centered environment were characteristics of schools with low suspension rates.

- SCHOOLS WITH HIGH SUSPENSION RATES

In schools where suspension rates are high, a wide spectrum of disciplinary policies were practiced. The pendulum swung from schools where there was a definite effort to "set standards" to schools where the suspension policy was unclear. In all these schools, suspensions were used to "bring the parent in", suggesting a low level of parental or community involvement. A dwindling or virtually non-existent Home and School Association was a typical characteristic of these schools. High student absenteeism and transience of the population were typical of these schools with the exception of two schools where the high suspension rates were probably explained by the way in which records were kept and reported. In these two instances, the principals were surprised at the high rate of suspension in their schools and in one school, the individual responsible for reporting suspensions admitted some degree of "guesstimation". In another school, students who were sent home for the day when it was evident that they were unable to function in the school environment were reported as a suspension.

If we focus on schools with high suspension rates where there is a clear disciplinary policy operating in the school, we found that this policy was designed to establish standards or control in the school. Within this framework, suspensions are used as the most effective means of implementing discipline. In other schools where the disciplinary policy is unclear, principals had delegated the discipline function to specific personnel who, then, implemented it rigorously. Again, in these cases, suspensions are used as a means to communicate with the parent or as a means to establish control.

In these schools, suspensions are used for repeated violations of the code of behavior. In this setting, students who are late repeatedly are suspended. Repetition rather than the nature or seriousness of the offense warrants a suspension.

- SCHOOLS WHOSE SUSPENSION RATES HAVE CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY

Changes in these schools were primarily associated with changes in personnel. In three of the schools visited, either the principal was new, or the individual charged with the discipline function was new. In the case of those schools with new

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principals, renewed leadership manifested itself in a variety of educational programs and projects whose aim is to motivate students and teachers. In one school, a principal had initiated voluntary staff development programs, as well as a variety of student projects designed to make the school a place "where everyone wanted to be".

In schools where the staff responsible for discipline had changed, the new staff had initiated alternative programs designed to address the problematic behavior of the student. The counsellor in these schools had begun to be involved in preventive rather than remedial programs to modify student behavior.

One secondary school whose rate had changed significantly for the better did not experience either a change in personnel nor a change in leadership. In this particular school an educational program had been initiated designed to prepare students for the working environment. In another school where suspension rates had decreased, there were three personnel changes in one year among those responsible for discipline.

CONCLUSIONS

Our site visits shed some light on possible explanations for the different rates of suspensions in our schools. A caveat is in order. Our conclusions are based on the interviews with principals at certain schools and nowhere do we intend to make generalizations applicable to all schools. There are patterns that one cannot disregard in the schools that were visited and that need further study. The patterns suggested are:

- In schools where suspensions were low or non-existing, principals made community-school involvement a high priority. Likewise, schools with high suspension rates were characterized by the absence of this involvement. Parental and community involvement and their impact on suspension rates was not the aim of this study, but it was a significant finding. In schools where the rates had dropped, it was evident that the principal believed in the importance of this involvement. In schools that had maintained a low rate over time, the involvement was often facilitated by an active Title I School-Community Coordinator.

- It is clear that an emphasis on instructional development had a beneficial impact on suspension rates. Educational improvement and discipline appear to be intricately related in schools with low suspension rates. Principals in

these schools are primarily concerns with improving instruction, rather than controlling student behavior.

- Likewise, in schools where suspension rates are high, the leadership was characterized by an attitude of "setting standards" in order to "achieve control". Leadership was exercised, but, a signigicant factor was that of the content area in which it was exercised. Schools which emphasized instruction and had initiated vigorous programs for instructional development were characterized by low suspension rates; schools where the leadership had emphasized disciplinary control seemed to be characterized by high rates of suspensions.

- In the two schools that were exceptions or for which there were no reasonable explanations to account for their high rates of suspension, the way in which the records were compiled seemed to account for these high rates.

- Last, but not least, alternative discipline programs existed in all types of school. At the high school level, alternative discipline programs were perceived by the students and staff as devoid of meaning or relevance and suspension was the only effective mechanism left to control the problem of disruptive behavior. At this level, schools with meaningful educational programs had lower suspension rates. At the elementary level, again, the existence of alternative disciplinary programs did not necessarily mean lower suspension rates.

Again, the word of caution. This report does not attempt to measure the effectiveness of programs on the students. The primary purpose is to relate school characteristics to suspension rates. We suggest, then, that the following school characteristics seem related to low rates of suspensions: 1) community involvement, 2) emphasis by the principal on instruction rather than control and 3) educational programs that interest and attract students.

We conclude this section with illustrations of the above, drawn from the site visits and our interviews. The schools described in the following pages have either low suspension rates or have experienced a change in these rates. They are not extraordinary schools or programs; but they are examples of extraordinary attempts at creating student-centered institutions.

1) THE BLAINE SCHOOL: "NO SUSPENSIONS HERE"

The children who attend the Blaine School know one thing - whatever they may do, they will get a fair hearing. And the parents know this as well.

Mrs. Cartwright, the principal of the Blaine School, is a strong believer in parental involvement in the school. She has established a no-suspension policy in the school. Parents know immediately when a child is 'acting out' in school. Underlying the no-suspension policy is the belief that a child cannot learn if he or she is not in school - and that learning is so important at that level that nothing shoud interrupt it.

The Blaine School emphasizes self pride and has initiated projects to encourage pride in self, in school and in community. Discipline policy at Blaine is clearly stated, but students are constantly reminded that learning is of prime importance.

2) COOK JUNIOR HIGH - WHERE IT'S OK TO BE AN ADOLESCENT

At Cooke Jr. High, in the Logan section of the city - it's ok to be thirteen. The principal, Dr. Spencer, specializes in that age group and knows the difficulties that being thirteen entails, but he has established programs and support systems at Cooke so that being thirteen may be a little easier to bear by all.

Cooke Jr. High has a fluid population; Blacks, Hispanics and Asians have moved into the area. Problems in the community are frequently acted out in the school. A blend of individualized academic programs and high expectations of students has enabled Cooke to address the problems of the early adolescent without removing him/her from the classroom. Rules are clearly spelled out and posted in every room. A disciplinary team overviews the discipline process and a well organized in-house suspension system permits the teacher and the student to nip a problem in the bud.

The in-house suspension room is designed to accomodate those students who are having a 'rough' day. Teachers refer students there -- and students have the option of self referral. Teachers supervise this room where there is plenty of work for the students. In addition to the in-house suspension room, there are other effective methods to encourage self discipline. Dr. Spencer believes in making going to school so attractive that a child will miss not being there. As a result, there is a strong sports program and various extra-curricular activities designed to absorb the boundless energy of the early teen-ager.

3) S.W.A.T. - A PROGRAM WHERE STUDENTS ARE SUCCEEDING

Gratz High School, in Nicetown, has its share of problems. Last year a student was stabbed by another and the police constantly survey the area. In the midst of all these problems, there is a program at Gratz that stands out. S.W.A.T. (School to Work Action Team Project) was initiated this year with support from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and in collaboration with the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. The program is housed in a large open space where students cluster in groups to complete assigned tasks. Quiet work predominates -- while at one end, a team from the Chamber of Commerce tries to develop jobs for the youth involved in S.W.A.T. and at the other end, students are videotaped and coached in interviewing skills. The S.W.A.T. program has been effective in reducing student absenteeism and has eliminated the need for suspensions among the participants. The students come in to the room, punch a time clock and pick up their individual files with work designed for them.

This program has characteristics which eliminate the need for suspensions; first, it is a realistic program which is designed to strengthen individual learning skills, secondly it operates in collaboration with a city agency with the purpose of getting jobs for students. Jobs are a major concern of low income urban youth -- and S.W.A.T. has begun to tackle this problem.

S.W.A.T. stands out not as a program to eliminate suspensions or as a remedial bandaid, but as a serious effort to begin looking at the underlying causes of juvenile disciplinary problems.

4) THE LEHIGH SCHOOL: CARING IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Nestled in a busy section of North Philadelphia, the Lehigh School has placed caring as its major disciplinary component. The principal*, Mr. Rogers, was able to reduce suspensions substantially from 1979 to 1980. not by emphasizing control but by emphasizing positive discipline. His philosophy is working at Lehigh.

Mr. Rogers maintains close contact with the teachers, the students and the parents. The key message he constantly sends through is that caring is important.

But how did all that theory about caring lead to such a dramatic drop in the number of suspensions given? Mr. Rogers explained that he began by realizing that suspensions just do not work. They don't work because they do not prevent the same problem from occurring again. And they don't work because they make everybody feel worse. Students feel angry and rejected. They are rejected by teacher and principal. They are teased by fellow students. They are further punished by angry parents. Rapport between student, home and authorities in the school breaks down. Nobody wins. This concerned Mr. Rogers a lot.

During the summer of 1979, instead of forgetting about his students, he developed a six-step process for problem-solving in his school.

Let's assume that Jane and Peter start fighting on the playground. Continuous fighting is one of the problems for which Mr. Rogers would have in the past, given a suspension. Now he brings both parties into the "Solution Room" close to his office. He seats them at two desks facing each other. With them, he (or another adult -- parent, teacher, staff person) reads through a chart on the wall which outlines the "Six Steps to Friendship". The steps involve a discussion of what happened, why, how it could have been prevented, a listing of the other person's good qualities, and a resolution about how to solve a similar problem in the future.

*This was based on visits during the 1980-81 school year. Mr. Rogers has been on sabbatical leave for the 1981-82 school year.

Mr. Rogers is hoping that soon teachers will set up a "problem-solving spot" right in the classroom. The same techniques would be used to solve conflicts "on the spot". This creative principal also hopes to use sound and video tapes in the future to further improve his methods of problem solving.

Mr. Rogers and his staff respect the children. They believe in their ability to solve problems in a rational manner. These are basic assumptions behind their approach. And it works. After all, the proof is in the pudding. The proof at Lehigh is only three suspensions since September, 1980 to February, 1981, an orderly school, and happy children -- plus a principal and staff who care.

5) THE DICK SCHOOL: PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY TO LEARNING

The first thing Linda Gottlieb did last year when she became principal of the Dick School was to initiate a clean-up campaign in the school. Then, she geared up her energy to ensure that everyone, teachers, staff, block captains, parents and the children were involved in the school. Projects, such as the Love Club were initiated. Participants in the Love Club pledge that they will not engage in violence of any form and must seek community sponsors that will endorse them. Operation Kinship, for the third and fourth grades, is a drug prevention program involving block captains of the community. And Project Success involves parent aides in every room. Every room has a volunteer parent aide and there is a long waiting list for the program.

Every room is cheerful and the students' work is displayed everywhere. The faculty at the Dick School voluntarily participates in staff development programs designed to improve instruction at the school. Instructional development is the guiding force and leit-motif of the school. The School Community Coordinator knows every parent and is a "phenomenal" worker, ensuring the vital connection between home and school which facilitates learning.

But perhaps what speaks more for itself, are the faces of the children at the Dick School -- these are kids who like school.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our children are out of school -- and it isn't summer. They are out of school in Philadelphia because of strikes and financial crises, but they are also out of school because they are suspended. Research and common sense tell us that students must be in school to learn. Excessive suspensions that exclude students from the learning environment defeat the basic purpose of our schools. When students are suspended so is their learning.

During 1980-81 approximately one of every seven students was suspended in Philadelphia's public schools. Almost one of every five minority students and one in every ten white students received a pink suspension slip last year. There are schools in Philadelphia where two thirds of the student population was suspended at least once during the school year 1980-81. These statistics are conservative estimates of the problem. They assume that each students has been suspended only once. The problem is magnified when one considers that many students were suspended more than once during the school year. Nor do the statistics tell us the total number of school days lost since legal suspensions last from one to five days. Under these conditions it is possible that as many as 200,000 school days were lost last year due to suspensions.[1]

In America there is an enduring belief in public education as the democratic institution to which all members of society have equal access -- or at least, should have equal access. When almost twice as many minority students are suspended as white students, as is the case in Philadelphia, then, we must question whether some members of society are being denied equal access to education through excessive use of suspensions.

The issue before us is not whether students are more troublesome now than they were in previous decades. The issue is whether the institution of school can adapt to meet the needs of those students or whether it is exacerbating problems by treating symptoms rather than causes of behavior.

This report does not aim to be more than an initial step to define the scope of the problem. It does raise issues, as it is bound to, by the very nature of the topic.

It is in this spirit that we make the following recommendations. Some recommendations may have already been evident throughout this report, and undoubtedly, many will come to our minds as we finish reading this report. To summarize these recommendations, we have focused on those issues that relate to policy, those that relate to practice and those that relate to procedure.

- POLICY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

1) It was clear in our research that although due process has been established in the practice of suspensions by various Court orders, when suspensions are to be used remains a vague and ambiguous area in the School District's discipline policy. The School District should develop a suspension policy which would explicitly reserve the use of suspensions to infractions of the Code of Student Misconduct.

2) Within the Code of Student Misconduct, the rule pertinent to Repeated Violations should be spelled out in detail so as to avoid the possibility of suspending a student for repeated minor offenses such as lateness, chewing gum, or wearing hats to school.

3) Suspension for attendance-related problems like lateness and cutting class should be clearly prohibited. Rewarding a student who has cut class, been absent or late, with a suspension from school is a basic contradiction.

4) Since suspensions are being used to get the student's parents in to the school, extra measures like calling the parent at the emergency phone number and sending a School-Community Coordinator (in Title I schools) to the home if there is no phone are measures that should be used before a student is excluded from school by suspension.

5) A task force should be developed at the system wide level which would monitor disciplinary practices and suspension rates and patterns throughout the system. This report begins to define a problem whose pulse should be monitored closely.

- PRACTICES

As has been clear throughout this report, suspensions have been used for a variety of reasons: to bring parents into the school, to reinforce a discipline policy, to remove the troublesome student from the school setting. In view of these findings, it seems there should be a renewed effort at all levels of the school system to identify the source of problematic behavior rather than punish it with a suspension.

6) There should be more appropriate approaches than suspensions for handling lateness, disrespectful behavior and other minor infractions. The "punishment" of suspensions should be reserved for very clearly defined and serious misbehavior.

7) If there is a communication problem with the parents of a student, that in itself is a challenge to be addressed by principals and school personnel. At stake here is the issue of parental involvement in the school. It is questionable whether the practice of suspensions is the most effective tool to reach that objective. If a student misbehaves, the parent should know immediately and should be allowed to intervene at the juncture where misbehavior is manageable.

8) This report has underscored the weakness of the reporting mechanism pertinent to suspensions. Although suspension records are kept for each student in his or her file, there is no mechanism by which principals and district superintendents are able to obtain a complete picture on suspensions for their schools or districts. There should be a mechanism for data collection at the district-wide level which would reveal suspension rates for each school, frequencies of suspensions in each school and total days lost to suspensions per school.

- PROCEDURES

9) Every school should have a code of discipline developed collaboratively by principal, parents, students and teachers. This code should be consistent with district-wide policy. The supplementary insert distributed by the central office should accompany the individual school code. Likewise, we suggest that school handbooks at both the elementary and secondary levels contain a section which spells out to parents their rights and the process by which a student may be reinstated in the event of a suspension. This discipline code should be printed and distributed each year to every student, parent and staff member. Hopefully the principal

or other key administrators will find ways to personally reinforce the spirit and content of that code, perhaps by personally reviewing it with each classroom or advisory.

10) Every principal should include staff development in classroom management techniques as part of his/her yearly planning. The Office of Affective Education has published a manual, Classroom Discipline; an Educational Approach which is a helpful guide to discipline management. This manual identifies four goals of student misbehavior: attention, power, revenge and displays of inadequacy (p. 108) and suggests ways by which these goals can be met within the instructional program rather than through punitive and reactive measures such as suspensions. Teachers need the full support of their principal and of each other. An atmosphere of mutual support would make it the exception rather than the rule for the principal or other school personnel to be called on if a teacher is faced with a problem she/he cannot adequately handle alone.

11) Ultimately, this report on suspensions raises the issue of the programmatic changes needed to adjust the institution to meet the needs of the student. Alternative programs, which have been piloted in Philadelphia and which have proven successful in engaging and teaching students, need to be expanded. While providing a quality, public education is the primary goal of our schools, it should be kept in mind that this goal is achieved by developing ways to engage students in the learning process, not by excluding them from this process.

Suspended Students: Suspended Learning is one step in defining the problem of suspensions in the Philadelphia public schools. Increasing the numbers of students who are learning in an orderly, caring environment is a common goal of Parents Union and of school officials. Parents Union intends to work closely with concerned school officials and community leaders to implement the recommendations that are stimulated by this initial report on suspensions in the Philadelphia public schools.

FOOTNOTES

(1) This estimate is based on the assumption that a student who is suspended at least once, is suspended for 3 to 5 days. If the lower limit of the length of suspensions is taken into consideration, three (3) days, then 35,713 suspensions times 3 days per suspensions equal 107,139 days lost to suspensions. Another assumption is that it is likely that at least 40% of the students have been suspended more than once. Under this assumption, then, the total number of days lost to suspensions if 40% of the students are suspended twice.

35,713 x 3 = 107,139	
+ (.40)(35,713) x 2 x 3 days	85,711
total days	192,850

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